

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Highlights from the State Board of Education *A monthly summary of key action and testimony taken by the SBE* *September 2001*

*****UC, CSU Seek Alignment with California Standards Tests*****

University of California President Richard Atkinson and a top official of the California State University told the State Board of Education they support the streamlining of testing for college-bound students, with the CSU saying it is eager to find a way to use the state's California Standards Tests for student placement into the 23-campus system.

In an appearance at the Board's September meeting, President Atkinson reiterated his proposal to eliminate the SAT I math and verbal tests as a requirement of admission into the UC. Instead, Atkinson is proposing a "comprehensive review" admissions policy. As envisioned, this policy would focus on SAT II achievement tests, and student completion of the current A-G course requirements. Atkinson said the policy also would include consideration of a student's performance on the California Standards Tests, which measure how well students have mastered the state's world-class academic content standards. These academic content standards lay out what students in grades K-12 should know and be able to do at each grade level.

"If we move toward comprehensive review, then we would be looking very much at the California Standards Tests, at the various Golden State Exams, and even the California High School Exit Exam, as part of that comprehensive review of a student applying to the UC," Atkinson told the Board. The idea, Atkinson said, is to replace the SAT I tests with achievement tests that "are closely correlated" with the A-G course requirements. The A-G course requirements "in a real sense," Atkinson said, are aligned to the state's content standards.

Board members suggested that the UC and the SBE work together to better align UC's A-G course requirements with the state's content standards.

Atkinson, meanwhile, called on the Board to add a standards-based writing test for high school students, saying that a soon-to-be-released UC report will show that the best predictor of college performance among the current crop of admissions tests is the SAT II writing test. "This is...the very best predictor by a huge amount," Atkinson said. Board President Reed Hastings suggested further discussions on the issue.

CSU Executive Vice Chancellor David Spence also appeared before the Board. Spence said the CSU, unlike the UC, is currently looking at using the state's standards-based tests for student placement into the CSU.

"Even more force and focus would be lent to the State Board of Education (content) standards...Students would really place more importance on the 11th grade (standards-based) test if we used it for our placement purposes," Spence told the Board.

The benefits of such a move would be fewer tests, less testing time and a reduction in the number of CSU students needing remediation because students would have their senior year to address academic shortcomings, Spence suggested.

"Meeting State Board of Education standards would not only mean school success, but also would mean placement into the CSU without further preparation," he said.

*****Reading Language-Arts Standards Test integrated into API*****

The Board unanimously approved recommendations to integrate results from the California Standards Tests for reading-language arts into the 2001 base of the Academic Performance Index or API, the state's annual statewide ranking of schools.

Currently, the API consists of a single measurement -- the Stanford 9 (SAT 9) nationally norm-referenced tests, which compare how California students rank in comparison with their peers nationwide.

The API, however, will largely become a "standards-driven" index with multiple measures.

In August, results for English-language arts standards tests were reported by performance level for the first time. Performance is measured at one of five levels: advanced, proficient, basic, below basic and far below basic, with "proficient" or above marking the state's desired performance level for all students. (Performance-level results will be reported next year for the mathematics, history-social science, and science standards-based tests and will then become part of the API no later than 2003.)

The Board approved a recommendation that results from the English-language arts standards tests constitute 60 percent of the English-language arts portion of the API. For elementary and middle schools, that means the English-language arts standards test will constitute 36 percent of their overall API score. For high schools, the English-language arts standards test will make up 24 percent of a high school's overall API score.

Board President Hastings asked California Department of Education (CDE) staff to reflect on the possibility of including the grade 2-7 mathematics California Standards Test performance levels in the 2001 base API, rather than waiting until 2002. He asked staff to bring back a recommendation and a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of this addition to the 2001 base API at next month's Board meeting.

***** SB 233 To Streamline Testing System*****

Board members received an update on Senate Bill 233, legislation sponsored by Gov. Davis and authored by State Sen. Dede Alpert, D-Coronado, to reauthorize the State Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program.

Glen Thomas, executive director of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, told the Board that SB 233 is in line with the goals of moving toward a standards-based assessment system while decreasing reliance on nationally norm-referenced tests, and eliminating redundant tests where possible.

The highlights of SB 233 include the following:

MATHEMATICS

- Legislative intent that for grades 2-11, beginning in 2003, a shortened form of the norm-referenced test would be used.
- New standards-based mathematics tests will be developed for grades 8 and 9 for students who have not completed Algebra I by grade 9.

***** SB 233, cont.*****

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS

- No later than 2005, the SBE would be required to determine the feasibility of using a shortened or survey form of the norm-referenced test in combination with a stand-alone standards-based test.

HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE & SCIENCE

- Elimination of history and social science norm-referenced tests in grades 9, 10 and 11, and the reduction of the length of the norm-referenced tests in science.
- For California Standards Tests, one history-social science test and one science test will be added to upper elementary grades.

GOLDEN STATE EXAM

- With an eye toward reducing testing time where standards-based tests duplicate Golden State Exams, the Golden State Exams would be reduced and used to augment the standards-based tests in specific subject areas.
- By the end of 2003, a study must be completed to determine if the Golden State Exams can be used for college placement and admissions.

*****Information Items*****

DISTRICT API – The Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) Advisory Committee of the SBE has made a recommendation that the Board should not develop a district-level API but instead develop a “district accountability measure” that assesses how well a district is supporting the teaching and learning of students.

Specifically, the PSAA Advisory Committee recommended that the CDE calculate what percentage of a district’s schools meet API growth targets; what percentage demonstrate API growth but do not meet growth targets; and what percentage have APIs that remain the same or decline. The Advisory Committee believes that this summary of accountability measures accomplishes the following purposes: 1) reinforces the importance of the state’s content standards; 2) creates a sense of urgency at the district level; 3) incorporates district leaders in the state’s accountability program; and 4) provides useful information to the public.

Board Member Suzanne Tacheny said there was consensus in the field around this set of measures, which could simply be described as a “district growth rate.” Tacheny added, “This is the place where we can comfortably move forward.” SBE Executive Director John Mockler noted that federal education reform is likely to include a district-level report card and that consideration should be given to including the number of students in a district who attend schools without an API score.

The Board instructed CDE staff to continue development of the accountability measures summary.

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